SOC 6303H

ETHNOGRAPHY

Thursdays, 11:00am – 1:00pm

Instructor: Professor Randol Contreras
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Classroom: TBA
Office hours: Thursday, 10:00am to 11:00am (or by appointment)


COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will teach students the (lonely) craft of ethnography, with two main foci: the collection and analysis of field data and the critique and analysis of ethnographic texts. Students should have a specific field site prior to the course since they will immediately begin writing up their insights and observations. In addition, students will evaluate selected ethnographies for their theoretical, analytical, descriptive, and writing contributions. The readings will come from the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, and range in their themes – from global sex work, to street-level book vending. This range exposes students to both traditional and innovative works, ones that will help them figure out their own ethnographic approach. In all, this course will serve as a space of dialogue and exchange, where students share field notes and experiences, offer constructive criticism and insights, and practice innovative writing and ideas.

LEARNING GOALS:

1. Students will learn how to collect and analyze their field research data.
2. Students will critically understand how scholars produce ethnographies.
3. Students will learn how to write clear ideas, analysis, and descriptions.
REQUIRED BOOKS


REFERENCE BOOK*


*This book will guide students in writing field notes and analyzing field data. Thus, students must read the book’s relevant chapters as we progress throughout the semester.

REQUIRED ARTICLES/CHAPTERS


EVALUATION ASSIGNMENTS

Students must submit critical evaluations of Sidewalk, Translated Woman, and Dealing in Desire (for obvious reasons, The Stickup Kids is excluded). Each assignment must be at least two single-spaced pages and broken up along the following four lines:

1) Theoretical Merit (or its place within the topic’s literature)
2) Analytical Rigor
3) Quality of Descriptions and Accounts
4) Writing Style and Clarity

FIELDNOTE ASSIGNMENTS

Students will be required to submit five field note assignments. The submissions will focus on specific topics to help students think about their fieldwork setting; their place within the research; and the search for themes and categories that will have them think creatively and add scholarly substance to their final product. Each assignment, which must be at least three single-spaced pages long, should pay attention to detail and have speculations about what is “going on.”

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Each student must participate throughout the semester. They can do so by sharing their field note insights or discussing their evaluation assignment. To get credit, the student can only discuss the field note or evaluation assignment on the day that it is due. In other words, the student cannot discuss any work that was previously submitted or that will be submitted in the future. Also, the student will only get credit for one participation per class. Thus, it is important for the student to participate progressively throughout the semester rather than wait until the end and run out of time.

VISUAL METHODOLOGICAL PRESENTATION

On the last day class, students will present photos/images of their field sites. The brief presentation (lasting no more than eight minutes) will help them learn how to present the methodology section of their ethnographic research: present the field site, the recruitment and entry process, and the study participants. The photos will give the audience a visual context for the research – and enliven the performance.
GRADE EVALUATION

5 Field Note Assignments (10 points each) 50 points
3 Evaluation Assignments (10 points each) 30 points
5 Class Participations (3 points each) 15 points
Visual Presentation 5 points

Total 100 points

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: Course Overview: Ethnography – What is it and why do it?

- Katz, “Ethnography’s Warrants.”*
- Geertz, “Thick Description.”*
- Geertz, “Deep Play.”*

*Try to read them before the first class (we will be discussing them).

WEEK 2 Entering a Field Site: Insider/Outsider Issues

- Myerhoff, “So What Do You Want From Us Here?”
- Kondo, “Eye/I.”
- Bucerius, “Becoming a Trusted “Outsider.”
- Contreras, “Recalling to Life.”
- Contreras, “Standpoint Purgatorio.”

*DUE: Field Note 1 – Field Site Description (sights, sounds, layout, etc.)

WEEK 3 Ethical Issues in the Field

- Thorne, “You Still Takin’ Notes?”
- Scheper-Hughes, “Parts Unknown.”

*DUE: Field Note 2 – Reflexive Positionality Account
WEEK 4  
*The Modern Chicago School Model*

- Duneier, *Sidewalk.*

*Due: Sidewalk Evaluation*

WEEK 5  
*Challenging the Chicago School Tradition* (read in order)

- Wacquant, “Scrutinizing the Street.”
- Duneier, “What Kind of Combat Sport is Sociology?”
- Choo and Ferree. “Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research.”

*Due: Field Note 3 – Group/Status Differences at the Field Site*

WEEK 6  
*Finding Global Forces in Everyday Life*

- Hoang, *Dealing in Desire*

*Due: Dealing in Desire Evaluation*

WEEK 7  
*Intersecting History, Social Structure, and Biography*

- Contreras, *The Stickup Kids*

*Due: Field Note 4 – A Study Participant in the Global/Social Context*

WEEK 9  
*Emotions in Ethnography* (read in order)

- Behar, “The Vulnerable Observer.”
- Rosaldo, “Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage.”
- Behar, “Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart.”

*Due: Field Note 5 – Creative/Sensory/Emotional Experience*

WEEK 8  
*Challenging the Ethnographic Orthodoxy*

- Behar, *Translated Woman*

*Due: Translated Woman Evaluation*
WEEK 10  Feminist Ethnography (read in order)

- Abu-Lughod, “Can There be a Feminist Ethnography?”
- Stacey, “Can There be a Feminist Ethnography?”
- Wheatley, “A Rejoinder to Judith Stacy.”

*DUE: Field Note 6 (choose only one of the following):

a. Revealing Raced, Classed, and Gendered Phenomena
   (or other phenomena, which you can discuss with me beforehand)

b. Showing A Feminist Approach in Action

WEEK 11  Embodied Ethnography

- Wacquant, “Carnal Sociology.”
- Okely, “Fieldwork as Embodied.”

*Guest Speaker (TBA)

WEEK 12  Visual Methodology Presentation

- Visual Presentations of the Field Site